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## How fifth grade elementary students select books

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## How fifth grade elementary students select books

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#### Abstract

This study was created to discover what strategies or influences impact a student's selection of books from the school library. The purpose of this study was to discover how fifth grade students select library books when they are seeking resources for voluntary reading. Seven students were observed and interviewed after their library check out time. Students volunteered to participate in the study with their consent and with their parent's consent. The researcher met with each student and presented the students with the same six interview questions within the duration of four weeks. The interviews provided the researcher with further insight to what factors impacted the selection of particular books of subject matter. The findings revealed two main factors that influenced them in them selecting library books: the classroom teacher's directives and the topics or subject matter of the books.

# HOW FIFTH GRADE ELEMENTARY STUDENTS SELECT BOOKS

A Graduate Research Project

Submitted to the

Division of School Library Studies

Department of Curriculum and Instruction

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA

By

Tiffany Evans

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This Research Study by:

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Titled:

How Fifth Grade Elementary Students Select Library Books

has been approved as meeting the research requirement for the

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study was created to discover what strategies or influences impact a student's selection of books from the school library. The purpose of this study was to discover how fifth grade students select library books when they are seeking resources for voluntary reading. Seven students were observed and interviewed after their library check out time. Students volunteered to participate in the study with their consent and with their parent's consent. The researcher met with each student and presented the students with the same six interview questions within the duration of four weeks. The interviews provided the researcher with further insight to what factors impacted the selection of particular books of subject matter. The findings revealed two main factors that influenced them in them selecting library books: the classroom teacher's directives and the topics or subject matter of the books.

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

A fifth grade student returns to the library shortly after class to ask if he can return the book he has just checked out. He has informed the teacher librarian that his classroom teacher said that the book he selected is not appropriate and that he needs to select a book that is appropriate for a fifth grade student to read. The student has selected a nonfiction book on mysteries of the unknown; he tells the librarian that he was interested in this book and cannot understand why his teacher will not allow him to read the book. The student makes the statement “That’s why I don’t like to check out books, because I have to read books that the teacher wants me to read.” The National Literacy Trust found in a study on the Reading for pleasure that the decline in students reading for enjoyment may have a connection to national testing, where the pleasure of reading was not the priority (Clark & Rumbold, 2006).

According to the AASL Standards For The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learner, students should be able to pursue personal and aesthetic growth (AASL, 2007). Students need to have the chance to select books that appeal to them and meet the students’ readability levels. Giving students the opportunity to freely select reading material that is of personal interest to them, without the interference of a teacher’s judgment, allows students to pursue books of their own personal interest. The AASL’s Position Statement on the School Librarian’s Role in Reading clearly states the importance of learners having opportunities to read for pleasure as well as for information (AASL, n.d).

#### **Problem Statement**

Some elementary students lack the knowledge of how to select appropriate books from the school library. Some students select inappropriate books for a variety of reasons.

Elementary students have a difficult time trying to find books that are of interest at their reading level. By understanding student's interest, teachers and teacher librarians can help students find more suitable selections of reading materials.

### **Audience**

This study will help teachers and teacher librarians understand the processes that students use to self-select books. Discussing students' book selections with them can provide insight needed to provide students with access to quality materials of student interest.

### **Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this study was to discover how fifth grade students select library books when they are seeking resources for voluntary reading.

### **Research Questions**

1. Why do fifth grade students choose the books they do from the library?
2. How do fifth grade students use the cover pictures, illustration in the book, and the book summary on the back cover when selecting books?
3. What other criteria do fifth grade students use in book selection?
4. What factors cause fifth grade students to avoid choosing books in the library?

### **Assumptions**

This study assumes that fifth grade students want to select books that are of interest to them and that meet their reading levels. Another assumption is that students have prior background knowledge on how to select books. Finally, the researcher assumes that children will be comfortable explaining their book selection decisions.

### **Limitations**

This research is limited to selection of library books by fifth grade elementary students. Another limitation of this study is that only students from one building will be

examined. This study may not represent the entire school population. An additional limitation will be the type of books available for students to select.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The purpose of this study was to discover how fifth grade students select library books. The review of the literature began by examining influences on students' self-selection. The review examined the reading interests of students. Finally, the literature review examined what factors motivate students in the process of self-selecting books.

#### **Influences on Self-Selection**

Various researchers have explored factors that influence how students approach the selection of books. Priest –Ploetz (2003) conducted a study focusing on the reading preferences of students in grades K-2. Priest –Ploetz (2003) noticed how students tended to shift their interest toward fiction books for checkout when they become older. Priest-Ploetz wanted to know why young patrons, especially boys, preferred nonfiction books.

Priest-Ploetz (2003) took data from the automated circulation records of 400 students. Of the 400 students, 140 were kindergarten students. Of those 140 students, 85% preferred to select nonfiction books in September of 2000. Whereas 94% of the boys checked out nonfiction books, kindergarten girls tended to select more fiction books. By November the same trends continued as boys continued to select nonfiction books at a higher rate than girls.

Priest-Ploetz (2003) discovered key factors that influenced these students to select particular books. Factors included the organization of materials within the library, the names of familiar titles and developmental levels. Since nonfiction books were grouped together according to their subject, this enabled pre reading students access to books about topics of interest to them. In contrast, fiction materials were organized according to the author's last name; this arrangement may be difficult for younger students to remember and locate those

books (Priest-Ploetz, 2003). Younger students were drawn to select books that were fiction if they were familiar titles such as popular series. Priest-Ploetz also stated the importance of the teacher and the curriculum,

Curricular and developmental factors also tended to introduce students to key concepts or subject in a framework of real life experiences in order to build upon future knowledge many primary school students seek facts to add to the base of knowledge that their classroom teacher has provided. (p. 26)

Therefore, if younger students were limited to only fiction books, they missed out on the opportunity to further investigate subjects on their own. Priest-Ploetz (2003) concluded that providing students with the opportunity to self-select reading materials allowed students to take ownership of their learning. Based on the data that Priest-Ploetz collected, she described the changes she made to her library program by removing limitations on student's choice of books, integrating both fiction and nonfiction into curricular unit studies, and presenting students with book talks and fiction book displays.

Another set of factors that influenced students in self-selection of books includes topics, author, writing style, cover/ illustrations, characters and the back of the book summaries (Swartz & Hendricks, 2000). Swartz and Hendricks examined factors that influenced the self-selection of books by students with special needs. Swartz and Hendricks collected data from middle school students in northwestern Ohio schools. Middle school students who were in grades sixth, seventh and eighth grade that had an Individual Education Plan or a 504 plan were selected to participate. Of those students 11 were sixth graders, 9 were seventh graders, and 11 were eighth grade students. Information was collected by using informal book chats (Swartz & Hendricks, 2000). These informal book chats were recorded, but students were allowed to stop the taping at any point if they did not understand something. These students choose from two book selections to discuss in the book chat, and

each group picked one of those books. Swartz and Hendricks asked students questions about the author, length, titles, covers, illustrations and characters. Swartz and Hendricks found that topic or subject matter of books appeared to be the most important factor for the selection of books by students with special needs. Swartz and Hendricks concluded that “Students with special needs want to read the same books as typically developing children” (p. 617). Swartz and Hendricks suggested “Educators must keep in mind that no two children are alike and that it is important that students be given a choice in reading materials” (p. 618).

### **Student Interest**

Researchers have considered students’ interest in certain books when it comes to how students select books (Gerlach & Rinehart, 1992). According to Gerlach and Rinehart, dozens of studies have been conducted in the area of young adult reading interest. Gerlach and Rinehart conducted a study that focused on why students select certain books, and whether those books match their interest and taste. Researchers surveyed 31 seventh and eighth graders from a large, middle class, suburban, public school. Students’ reading abilities ranged from fifth grade levels to ninth grade. Students were presented with ten books of fiction that they were asked to examine. Gerlach and Rinehart interviewed students individually and taped the discussions on how students felt about looking at the cover of each of the books. This study showed that 49% selected the summary inside the cover flap as the most predominant clue as to what kind of topic or subject was presented in the books (Gerlach & Rinehart, 1992). The book’s illustrations and title were the next two important factors when students examined these books. If the book had illustrations of interest to the students, they were more likely to select that book to read. This study also identified that students were more likely to read a book based on another student’s recommendation.

Students also stated that they “would read books that were suggested by their teachers” (p. 294). Gerlach and Rinehart stated, “Teachers continue to stay informed on what students’ interest are, but teachers need to go one step further and find ways to help their students determine whether a book is worth reading by examining its cover” (p. 294). Teachers can encourage their students to be interested in more books by including a wider variety of books that meet specified interests of students.

Researchers have also considered how children select books for recreational reading. Mohr (2006) conducted a study with 190 first grade students in a small rural, becoming urban school district in the southwest United States. Mohr performed a three part study to investigate preferences, selection processes, and the students’ rationales for their choices. This study invited first graders to select their favorite book from nine high quality, well illustrated picture books that represented a variety of topics, media, and genres. Students were asked to select one of the nine books and explain why they selected that particular book. The research showed that a majority of the first grade students preferred informational books, especially animal books. This included girls who have previously been thought to favor narrative text. The study did not take into consideration students’ reading levels or verbal skills within the data. Mohr recommended that younger students should have been presented with the opportunity to select more informational books and that teachers need to teach students about the various genres of books.

According to Moss and McDonald (2004) children’s reading habits and their text preference remains an important focus of inquiry. Researchers Moss and McDonald conducted a study that looked at the library records of students and analyzed what types of books students tended to self-select. Moss and McDonald took data from the computerized library borrowing records from a cohort of 90, year 6, ages 10-11 year old children over the

course of one academic school year. Moss and McDonald examined how data from students library records can tell us about children's reading habits.

The researchers noticed that most students checked out books during their whole class visits. Researchers also noticed that the library was organized in two main areas, of nonfiction and fiction books. Moss and McDonald (2004) found that by examining student library records, it was possible to find out who had been borrowing the most books in a given time period as well as what titles were checked out the most. As Moss and McDonald state "Library borrowing records are unobtrusive measures of the use children make of the resources available over time" (p. 402). Researchers concluded that library records can give insights into student's preferences in books. This provides teachers with information about students' interests and favorite topics. The researcher also indicated that when students were provided with diverse materials, schools, and teachers were better able to meet the needs of students.

### **Student Motivation**

Giving students the ability to self-select their own books motivates students to read. According to Clark (2005) "research literature shows that reading for pleasure or independent reading benefits children in numerous ways" (p. 26). Clark conducted an analysis of the National Literacy Trust's survey in 2005, which composed a survey of over 90 primary and secondary schools in England to explore why some students choose to read and others did not. The National Literacy Trust surveyed 8,206 students from 57 primary and 41 secondary schools. The survey was composed of a 23 point self report questionnaire (Clark, 2005). The sample included a nearly equal representation of boys and girls with 52.9% boys and 47.1% girls (p. 26). The students' ages ranged from 4 to 18 years of age. Clark explained that 56.8% of the girls enjoyed reading compared to 46.1 % of the boys (p. 26).



Clark also noticed that 70.3% of the students in primary school enjoyed reading compared to 43.1% of secondary students.

The findings also indicated that students were more motivated to read if they had more time to read for enjoyment (Clark, 2005). Clark concluded that students would be no more likely to read more because of encouragement from their families, friends or teachers (p. 27). Only 12.8% of students said that encouragement from home would motivate them to read more, and only 13.3% said that they would be motivated to read more if they had more encouragement from school.

Another factor that impacts the motivation of students to read is when students are provided the opportunity to self-select nonfiction books for in class reading especially with middle school students. Moss (2002) stated, "Interest in reading declines in the middle school grades and continues its descent through the high school year" (p. 9). Research clearly confirms that the time spent reading self-selected materials in school not only increases positive feelings about reading, but also improves achievement. Moss conducted a study to examine how sixth grade students select nonfiction trade books when they are presented with the opportunity. The researcher wanted to examine the students' motivation for selecting specific nonfiction trade books for small group and voluntary reading.

Moss (2002) conducted a two year ethnographic case study of language arts classes in the year 1997 through 1999. A qualitative research model provided a long term examination of the student's responses to nonfiction books. Participants included 48 sixth grade students from two classrooms in Ohio. The classrooms were visited once a week for the duration of the study. Data were collected from videotaped small and large group book discussions during the course of the study. Information was also collected from written journal responses, book logs and student interviews. The results from this study showed that 75% of the

students selected a particular nonfiction text because this was information that they needed to know. As the school year continued, Moss discovered that 40% of the students started to use their knowledge of nonfiction authors and text to self-select reading materials. Students were also more motivated to read if they had knowledge of book awards and the various genres. Moss explained that 29% of the students had an awareness of book awards and the differences in the types of books available. Moss also discovered that 29% of the students used a personal connection to select nonfiction books. Moss explained that another 27% of students indicated that they would use recommendations from other classmates or their teachers. Moss recommended expanding texts to include high quality nonfiction titles to give students a range of subjects and topics that can motivate students to read more nonfiction titles.

Other researchers have identified various strategies that impact the motivation of students. Kragler and Nolley (1996) stated “Allowing children to self-select their reading materials is a powerful motivator for children” (p. 354). They conducted a study focusing on the book selection strategies of fourth graders. The researchers examined the type of information that motivated and guided students’ selection of books. This study was based upon the responses of 17 fourth grade students in an elementary school in Indiana (p. 356). Students took a placement test prior to the start of the project that revealed readability levels ranging from second grade to sixth grade. Students were asked various questions in regards to what prompted them to select certain types of books.

Kragler and Nolley (1996) collected data by having teachers conduct student interviews during their reading conference time. The researchers identified that students were motivated to select books based on the physical characteristics of the book, recommendations of peers and teachers, and the reading level of the books. Kragler and Nolley concluded, “that

students who are encouraged to self select their own reading materials are more motivated and enthusiastic as readers” (p. 365).

### **Summary**

The review of literature in this chapter focused on the various factors that influenced how students self-select books. Understanding what factors impacted students’ self selection is an important part of supporting students to become successful, independent readers. This review included various researchers’ findings on how students self-select books. This chapter shows that choices, motivation and interest are repeatedly emphasized in the research literature. However the prior studies either were completed in classroom contexts or summarized library circulation records. This study provides data about fifth grade student decisions in book selection collected in the context of a school library. It uses semi structure interviews conducted by a school librarian in addition to analyzing students’ checkout records from the school’s online circulation system, Destiny.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

Understanding how students select books can help teachers and teacher librarians with insight into what kind of subjects and topics students are interested in reading. There has been minimal published research revealing how fifth grade students self-select books from the library. The purpose of this study was to discover how fifth grade students select library books when they are seeking resources for voluntary reading.

#### **Research Design**

To gather data, the researcher conducted a qualitative action research study using semi structured interviews of fifth grade students. Pelton (2011) noted that “action research is simply an organized, proven, and reliable process for ensuring that you use the data in your classroom to evolve into the high quality educator that your students need and deserve” (p. 5). This method was appropriate for this study as the researcher was a teacher librarian looking at what materials need to be purchased for the school library to fit the interests of fifth grade students. Pelton stated that educators can use the sights and sounds of their research as potential sources of collecting qualitative data. This particular study analyzed how fifth grade students select books from the school library. Some of the limitations to this particular method entailed the fact that this is a smaller segment of the fifth grade population that was being interviewed for research. Semi structured interviews also have some limitation of the potential of interference by the interviewer. The researcher had to be able to communicate with participants of the study with a non biased approach. Data was collected based on the responses of seven students from one class of fifth grade students within the confines of the school library from an urban elementary school in Iowa. Knowing why and how students select library books will provide educational personnel the ability to provide

students with reading material that is of interest to the students. Pelton (2011) states “your data can serve to guide and validate current actions” (p. 11). This qualitative action research study stems from the belief that when students have the ability to select their own choice of reading materials in the school library, students will have a sense of ownership in their own learning. The focus of this study was to answer the question of how fifth grade students select books from the school library, which will inform future library collection development.

### **Procedure**

The population for this study consisted of seven students in a class of fifth grade at an urban elementary school in Iowa. Participants consisted of one male and six female students that ranged from the age of 10 to 11 years of age.

Before the semi structured interviews, the researcher obtained approval from the Institutional Research Board from the Office of Sponsored Programs at the University of Northern Iowa. Students in one fifth grade classroom were invited to participate in this action research study by the researcher. The researcher first verbally introduced students to the invitation of participating in this study. The researcher provided each student with a parent letter of introduction to the study, a parent consent form, and a student assent form. The researcher explained the purpose of the action research study and how data was collected and used. In order for students to participate, they had to return the parent consent letter signed and dated along with a signed and dated student assent form.

Students were given a subject of interest questionnaire at the start of the research (see Appendix A). The interest questionnaire provided the researcher with information on what type of subjects interested the student participants. Interview questions were constructed in order for the researcher to collect data that was brief and easily analyzed. The questions for the semi structured interviews were composed to be age appropriate for fifth grade students.

The questions were based on how and why they selected particular books that day at the school library. Wildemuth (2009), states that “researchers often choose to use semi structured interviews because they are aware that individuals understand the world in varying ways” (p. 233). This method worked best for this study because the researcher was analyzing the thoughts of the participants. The semi structured approach to interviewing also gives the researcher the ability to ask questions and probe further to gain insight into participants’ responses (Wildemuth, 2009). The researcher used the same questions with the fifth grade class approximately once a week during one month (see Appendix B). The interview consisted of six questions developed by the researcher about how students feel and why they selected the books they did that day. The researcher recorded students’ responses onto the student interview questionnaire form (see Appendix B). Due to the fixed school library schedule, the researcher interviewed the student participants weekly during their scheduled library time. The researcher also took data from students’ check out logs by using information from the school’s online circulation system, Destiny. This provided the researcher with the various titles of books that students had selected.

Student responses were used to understand how fifth grade students select books from the school library. The researcher analyzed the interview responses by looking for patterns and comparisons between students on how they selected books. Using the qualitative approach, the researcher looked for similarities and differences in students’ responses. This study provided data to help educators make decisions about what types of literature students in fifth grade are most interested in reading, in order to provide this in the library collection.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **DATA ANALYSIS AND SUMMARY**

The purpose of this study was to discover how fifth grade students select library books when they are seeking resources for voluntary reading. This researcher interviewed seven students from one fifth grade class in an urban elementary school in Iowa who returned signed consent forms through the University of Northern Iowa Institutional Review Board process. The students were interviewed during four consecutive library periods after the selection of their library books. Students were asked the same six questions during each interview process. Students shared their reasons for selecting particular books during their library time. The questions allowed students to share what type of books they liked to check out, why they chose those particular books, and what outside influences impacted their selection of books in the library.

#### **Data Analysis**

Prior to the interviews, the seven students indicated their reading preferences on the topic of interest questionnaire (see Appendix A). Table 1 shows the students' initial subject interests. Students had a choice of fifteen different topics of interest and had the option of adding additional subjects, if they were not listed on the questionnaire. Out of the fifteen topics, sports was the topic of interest selected most often, with six of the seven students selecting this area. The topics of Fantasy characters, Characters who are different from me, Characters my own age who have done some amazing things, and Animals each had five out of seven students select those as topics that interested them. Students also selected celebrities and musicians as the next favorite subjects. Two students showed interest in books that dealt with the topic of romance.

Students showed very little interest in the areas of science, historical figures, or characters from other countries, with only one student selecting these topics. None of the students showed interest in the topic of science fiction and transportation.

Table 1

*Student Results from Topic of Interest Survey Questionnaire*

Topic Of Interest	Students							Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Science					X			1
Animals	X	X	X	X	X			5
Sports	X	X	X	X	X	X		6
Fantasy characters	X	X			X	X	X	5
Musicians		X	X		X			3
Celebrities		X	X	X		X		4
Historical Figures					X			1
Romance				X		X		2
Science Fiction								0
Transportation								0
Characters my age who have done some amazing things	X	X	X			X	X	5
Characters from other countries			X					1
Characters who have overcome great obstacles		X			X	X		3
Characters a lot different from me		X	X	X	X		X	5
Character like me	X	X				X		3

During a four week period students were interviewed individually as they finished selecting their books during their library class time. The researcher used the questions from the student interview question form (see Appendix B). Students were also asked to share the titles of the books that they checked out during each interview. Students spent no more than five minutes each time with the researcher to answer the questions. Students met with the researcher in a private area within the school library. Students discussed their answers with the researcher. Students were allowed to share any additional information that they wanted to



share in regards to their selection of library books. Although many school libraries may not limit fifth grade students to two books at checkout, it was the practice in this school, and was not a constraint imposed by this research study.

### **Student One**

In the first interview, Student One reported that his teacher required the students from the classroom to checkout a nonfiction informational book. Student One selected the book *The Los Angeles Dodgers* (Grabowski, 2003) as his informational text selection. He stated that he liked the topic of baseball and that *The Los Angeles Dodgers* book would also meet the required informational text that his teacher requested that students check out. Student One stated that he would have probably selected a sports book if they were not required to select an informational text book, since the subject of baseball is a favorite topic of his. The other book that Student One selected was a fantasy book, *Warriors Fire and Ice* (Hunter, 2003) that he renewed for the second time. Student One stated that this particular book was part of a series and that his friends were also reading similar books within the series. Student One indicated that when he selected books that were fantasy based, he picked those particular books by using the cover of the book and the summary on the back of the book.

Within week two Student One checked out a fantasy fiction book that was a continuation in the book series *Warriors into the Wild* (Hunter, 2003). Student One stated that he selected this particular book because he likes to read books in order if they are numbered in a series. He stated that this particular book series highly interested him because of the characters and the excitement of the book. The other book that Student One selected was the book, *New York Yankees* (Grabowski, 2002). Student One likes to read books on baseball or other sports related topics. Once again the teacher requested that all of the students check out a book that was informational text.

During week three Student One renewed the book in the fiction series, *Warriors Into the Wild* (Hunter, 2003). Student One was very interested in finishing this particular book so that he could move on to the next book in the series. This was the third week that the classroom teacher requested that the students also select another informational text. Student One checked out another book on the topic of sports in general. Student One reported that he liked to select books that contained lots of action that would keep him interested.

When Student One was interviewed in week four, he was able to select both books at his own choice. This time during checkout, Student One went ahead and selected one book on baseball and another fiction book in the *Warriors* book series. The baseball book was *St. Louis Cardinals Baseball Team* (Pietrusza, 2001). Student One shared that he would most likely check out a book on baseball that is in the series that he has already started reading and that he would also select another book within the fiction book *Warriors* series. Even though the teacher did not require him to check out an informational text, he still wanted to continue reading those informational texts because he was familiar with the format of the book.

Over the four week period, Student One checked out books in the genres of fantasy and sports. These were all in areas that fit the reading interests he identified in the Topic Interest Questionnaire (see Table 1).

### **Student Two**

During week one Student Two shared in her interview that she was required to check out an informational text and a fiction book. Student Two checked out the fiction book, *The Meanest Doll in the World* (Martin, 2003) and the nonfiction book, *Not for Parents USA Everything You Wanted to Know* (Evans, 2003). During Student Two's interview she stated that she used the summary on the back cover of the book. Student Two also shared that she liked to read books that had exciting characters that were similar to realistic fiction. When

Student Two selected her fiction book for the week, she went ahead and selected another book from the same series of the pervious book that she had read. She liked the first book in the series so she thought that she would most likely enjoy reading the next book in the series. Student Two indicated that they were currently learning about informational text features in the classroom. Student Two said that she figured that she would read an informational text about the United States since that was of some interest to her.

In week two Student Two once again selected a fiction and nonfiction book. She had not finished her fiction book from the first week. She decided to renew it so that she would be ready for the next book in the series. For Student Two's informational text, she selected the book, *Scholastic Encyclopedia of the Presidents and their Time* (Rubel, 2005). Student Two clearly stated that she wanted to learn all of the presidents' names and that is why she picked this particular book. She also stated that once she learned all the presidents' names she wanted to share that information with her parents. Once again the classroom teacher was still in instructing students about the text features of informational text. Therefore students were required to have one fiction and one informational text of their choice. Student Two had continued her interest in American history, therefore she found a book that was similar to the format of the book she had checked out the previous week.

During week three Student Two was still completing her two books from her pervious checkout. She did share in her interview that she would have still been required to select a fiction book and a nonfiction informational book for the week. She said that she was learning a lot from her nonfiction book because it was about the different United States presidents. She said she would be done with that book this week and ready to check out another nonfiction informational book on another topic on the United States since she really enjoyed the past two selections she had checked out from the library.

In week four Student Two checked out the book, *Belle Teal* (Martin, 2001) as her fiction selection. She stated that she picked this book because she heard from her peers that this was a really good book for her to read and that she would enjoy it. She said that sometimes when she is looking for books, she might ask another classmate about a book to get a recommendation on what might be a good book to read. For Student Two's nonfiction selection she picked out a book on the called *Our Fifty States* (Bockenbauer, 2004). She picked this particular book because it was a nonfiction informational text that she would be interested in reading. She thought that since she already started reading nonfiction books on different aspects of the United States, she thought this would be another book of interest to her. Student Two indicated that if her teacher had not required them to check out a nonfiction informational text with certain features she would have probably selected another type of nonfiction book.

Over the four week period, Student Two checked out books in the genres of fantasy and historical topics. Student Two selected books that were identified in the Topic Interest Questionnaire (see Table 1) showing interest in the topic of Fantasy and Characters Who had Overcome Great Obstacles. Student Two did not identify in her Topic of Interest Questionnaire that she was interested in reading historical books even though she selected those particular books during the research.

### **Student Three**

Student Three was also instructed during week one to check out a fiction and informational text. During week one, Student Three selected the fiction book, *Beast Quest Ferro the Fire Dragon* (Blade, 2007). She selected this book because it was part of a book series and she liked to read books that contained a story line. She also shared that she thought dragons were really cool and this made her want to keep reading this series to see what

happens next. She stated that books that make her excited to read are books with details on everything the character is doing and feeling throughout the book. She also shares that her favorite book to read is *Ghost Dog Secrets* (Kehret, 2010) because she read this book in her classroom in a small group instructional setting. Student Three stated that she uses her previous knowledge about particular topics and she also uses the five finger rule to help her select books. She also discussed that she always picks one fiction and one nonfiction book. During this week's book selection she had to locate a nonfiction informational text from the library. Student Three picked the book *Not for Parents China Everything you Ever Wanted to Know* (Forbes, 2012). She said some of her friends had recommended that book to her because she was having a difficult time locating a good informational text.

On week two Student Three indicated that once again her teacher required that the students would need to select a fiction book of their choice and an informational text. Student Three was still reading her fiction book that she had checked out the week before, so she renewed that book for the second week. She selected the book, *Not for Parents London* (Lamprell, 2011) as her informational text selection, because she said that she wanted to learn more about the "country" of London. She liked the format and how the text features presented information, as she did a quick look through the book. As she selected this book she stated that she thought about what makes a good informational text, and whether this book has the features she has learned about.

During week three Student Three selected the book *Not for Parents New York Everything You Ever Wanted to Know* (2011, Lamprell). For Student Three's nonfiction informational text she once again select the same type of book in the series, *Not for Parents*. She shared that she had become very familiar with the format of the book and that it was easy for her to locate the book because she had checked out other books in that series. Students

Three stated that she had more time to focus on her fiction selection for this week because she knew exactly where to locate her informational book that the classroom teacher required her to checkout. Student Three checked out the book *Beast Quest Sepron the Serpent* (Blade, 2004) for her fiction book. Student Three communicated with me that she wanted to continue to read the next book in the series *Beast Quest* because she really enjoyed reading the first book in the series.

Upon week four Student Three selected a different format of a book for her nonfiction informational book. She stated that she decided to look for a science book this time and she thought about what kinds of topics interested her in the area of science. Student Three thought that she would enjoy a book about animals so she selected the book *Fish Sleep But Don't Shut Their Eyes and Other Amazing Facts about the Ocean* (Berger, 2004). Student Three said that since she still had to finish her fiction book from last week, she was able to spend more time looking for a nonfiction informational text.

Over the four week period, Student Three checked out books in the genres of fantasy, science and history. Student Three only identified the area of fantasy in her reading interests, which were identified in the Topic of Interest Questionnaire (see Table 1). She did not indicate that she showed interest in books about history or science in her Topic of Interest Questionnaire.

#### **Student Four**

When Student Four was interviewed in week, one she shared that she really likes to read books that are realistic fiction. She also shared that she gets excited about books that leave her in suspense because it makes her want to keep reading to find out what is going to happen next. Student Four shared that when she selects books, she takes the time to flip through the book and skim random pages to see if the book would be of interest to her.

She also shared that she makes sure that the books she pick out are books that are at her readability level. She checked out the fiction book *Amalee* (Williams, 2004) because she saw that this book appeared to have realistic fiction features that she liked to read. For Student Four's informational text, she selected the book, *Science Files Materials Plastics* (Parker, 2002) because she felt that this was a topic that she wanted to know more about and because it met the requirements that her teacher asked students to look for in an informational text. Student Four discussed how she always picks one book from the fiction section and one book from the nonfiction section.

In week two Student Four once again checked out a realistic fiction book and an informational text book. Student Four selected the realistic fiction book, *The Romeo and Juliet Coed* (Stone, 2011), because this was a book that she thought would be a good fit in her interest in realistic fiction. For Student Four's informational text book selection she picked the book *Textiles* (Parker, 2002), because she thought this might be another subject that might interest her and it looked like it had all the key features of information text. In week three, Student Four had to renew her realistic fiction book from the previous week's checkout. She selected a new informational text for the week about information on things from Rome. The book was entitled, *Not for Parents Everything You Wanted to Know about Rome* (Lamprell, 2011). She was really interested in this book because it had lots of information and facts on Rome. She said that she had started to really enjoy reading nonfiction books. She said as she selected her nonfiction book for the week she used the five finger rules to make sure that she selected a book that was the best fit for her.

When Student Four was interviewed during week four, she stated that she was still reading her realistic fiction book from the first week. She renewed her realistic fiction and selected a new nonfiction book. She was still required to select a nonfiction informational

text book from the library. Student Four shared that during this week's checkout she specifically looked for an informational text with the features that her teacher had been teaching them. Student Four discussed that as she looked for her nonfiction book she was thinking about what type of things she liked and if she could locate a book in the library. She stated that once again she used the five finger rule to help her select an informational text that best fit her reading ability.

Over the four week period, Student Four checked out books in the genres of realistic fiction, romance and science. She identified in her Topic Interest Questionnaire (see Table 1) that she liked the topic of romance. Student Four did not indicate that she was interested in the topic of science, yet she selected several books on that topic.

### **Student Five**

When Student Five was interviewed she shared that she would normally check out a fiction and a nonfiction book. During her first week of check out she selected the book, *Bunnicula Meets Edgar Allan Crow* (Howe, 2006) as her fiction book, and for her informational text she selected the book, *Children's Quick and Easy Cookbook* (Wilkes, 1997). She said that she picked a fiction book that had vampires with a mystery twist to them. She said that she had used the back of the book's summary to see if she would like this fiction book. She shared that she really liked science a lot, and that is why she selected the cook book because she thought that the recipes would be like experiments. She also knew that this nonfiction book had the text features that her teacher had been teaching them about in the classroom.

During week two Student Five had renewed the same books that she had from the following week. During her interview she stated that she made sure that the books that she had renewed were a good fit for her as fiction and nonfiction books. She also stated that she



made sure that her nonfiction book incorporated the elements of a quality informational text that her teacher had discussed in the classroom.

During week three Student Five selected once again one fiction and one nonfiction informational book. Student Five stated that for her nonfiction informational book *Minerals and Rocks* (Allen, 2009) was selected because she had an interest in minerals and it also met the requirements that her teacher asked students to look for in an informational text book. For Student Five's fiction book she selected the book *Swindle* (Korman, 2008). Student Five stated that she likes to read books that surprise the reader by using the element of adventure and that she likes books that are nothing like her own life. Student Five also shared that when she selected her books for the week she flipped through the book and skimmed the pages to see if she would be interested in reading the books.

On week four Student Five was not finished with her previous selection of books. She was still required to select one fiction and one nonfiction informational book from the library as instructed by her classroom teacher.

Over the four week period, Student Five checked out books in the genres of fantasy and science. These were all in areas that fit the reading interests she identified in the Topic Interest Questionnaire (see Table 1). Even though Student Five had also selected other areas of interest in her questionnaire, she seemed to select books in these particular areas.

### **Student Six**

Student Six checked out one fiction book called *Also Known As Harper* (Leal, 2009) and a nonfiction informational book called *The Boston Celtics* (Grabowski, 2003). Student Six stated that she picked the *Boston Celtics* because she really enjoys sports like basketball. For Student Six's fiction book she selected a book that would have a lot of drama, adventure and action throughout the book. She stated that she liked to read fiction stories similar to the

book *The Hunger Games* (Collins, 2008). Student Six also shared that she would typically select a fiction and nonfiction book from the library without the direction of the classroom teacher.

During week two Student Six selected a fiction and nonfiction informational book from the library. She needed to renew her fiction book due to the length of the book, she did not have enough time to finish her fiction selection. For Student Six's nonfiction informational book, she selected the book *Reptiles and Amphibians* (Key, 2003) from the library. Student Six stated that she really wanted to learn more about the topic so that she could learn more about reptiles and amphibians. Student Six shared that a book is exciting to read when it is about a topic that she likes and want to know more about. She also shared that she looks for particular books by their topics in order to figure out if she would be interested in checking that book out.

In week three Student Six was still reading her same fiction book. She selected the book *Metals* (Parker, 2002) as her nonfiction informational text because she wanted to learn more about what metals were and how people use metals. She also shared that when she went to look for a nonfiction informational book, she was thinking in her head what key features would make a quality informational text. She had to look through several books before she could find a book that met the requirements that her classroom teacher had instructed them to find.

During week four Student Six was only able to select a nonfiction book because she did not have enough time to select a fiction book. Student Six checked out the nonfiction informational book called *Mississippi River* (Klingel, 2000). She stated that she was interested in the Mississippi River and that she wanted to learn more about the river. She

thought that this book would be interesting to her and that it would meet the requirements of the type of nonfiction informational that her teacher asked her to check out.

Over the four week period, Student Six checked out books in the genres of fantasy, animals, history, science, and sports. Sports was the only topic that Student Six identified in the Topic Interest Questionnaire (see Table 1). Student Six did select books in other areas of interest but she did not select those in her Topic Interest Questionnaire (see Table 1).

### **Student Seven**

Student Seven was instructed during week one that she needed to select a fiction and nonfiction informational book from the library. She shared that during class the teacher had been teaching them about text features in nonfiction books. She said she had also been interested in reading books that were on the Iowa Children's Choice Award list. For Student Seven's fiction selection she picked the book, *Turtle in Paradise* (Holm, 2010). She stated that she wanted to read a fiction book that would have situations that you would not encounter in everyday life. She said that she used the back cover of the book to help her select her fiction book. When Student Seven is in the library she really likes to check out fiction books more than nonfiction books because she loves to read about fantasy. For Student Seven's nonfiction informational book, she picked out the book *Ferrets* (McNicholas, 2003). She thought it would be an interesting book because it was about an animal and it met the requirements that her teacher was looking for students to find in an informational book.

During week two Student Seven selected the fiction book *The Familiars* (Epstein, 2010) and the nonfiction informational book, *Rats* (McNicholas, 2003). She states that this week she picked her books out by looking at the pictures and the back of the book. When she selected her fiction story she also thought in her head about getting a book that was a fantasy

story because she was in the mood for a magical story. She selected the book *Rats* (McNicholas, 2003) because she thought that book would meet the needs of what her teacher was looking for in a nonfiction informational book. She also selected this book because it was similar in format to the animal book she checked out last week.

Within week three Student Seven was not finished with her two book selections from the previous week. Student Seven had to renew her books in order to finish them. She did share with me during her interview that she wanted to finish her current fiction story so that she could move on to the next Iowa Children's Choice Award book. She also shared that she likes to read fiction because she can use her imagination and see what happens step by step as the story unfolds. She also said that fantasy fiction books are her favorite books to read.

On week four Student Seven was not able to select a fiction book due to the limited amount of time during library checkout. Student Seven did check out a nonfiction informational book called *Hermit Crabs* (Binns, 2004). She stated that she checked out this book because it was gross looking and she thought it would be interesting. Student Seven used the front cover of the book and she flipped through the pages to get an idea of what this book had to offer. She also stated that during book checkout she used the five finger rule to help her figure out if this book was a book that was a good fit for her.

Over the four week period, Student Seven checked out books in the genres of animals and fantasy. Fantasy was the only area that she identified in the Topic Interest Questionnaire (see Table 1) as her reading interest.

### **Students' Actual Book Selections Related to Topic of Interest Survey**

Many students selected books consistent with their interests. Additionally, some students selected books in new areas they did not mark in the Topic of Interest Survey (see Table 1). Moreover, students marked a number of topics for which they did not find books

during the four weeks of these interviews. Table 2 shows students' actual book selections related to their Topic of Interest Survey indications.

Table 2

*Students' Actual Book Selection Related to Topic of Interest Survey Questionnaire*

Topic Of Interest	Students						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Science			NEW	NEW	X		
Animals	D	D	X	D	X	NEW	NEW
Sports	X	D			D	X	D
Fantasy characters	X	X	NEW		X	X	X
Musicians		D	D		D		
Celebrities		D		D		D	
Historical Figures		NEW	NEW		D		
Romance				X		D	
Science Fiction							
Transportation							
Characters my age who have done some amazing things	D	D	D			D	D
Characters from other countries			D				
Characters who have overcome great obstacles		X			D	D	
Characters a lot different from me		D	D	D	D		D
Character like me		D				D	

Note. **NEW** =Topics that students did not select in the questionnaire but checked out; **D** =Topics students selected on their questionnaire but did not checkout; **X** =Topics students selected on their questionnaire and checked out.

## Summary

This chapter summarizes the interviews of the seven students during their weekly library checkout period. All of the students were interviewed after their book selections, where they were questioned on what type of book they selected and how they selected their particular books. It was determined that although the students used different methods to select their books, it appears that the topic of the book (mentioned by all seven students) was a main factor in how students selected their library books (see Table 3). Another area mentioned by all students was the instruction of their classroom teacher about what type of nonfiction informational book they also needed to select (see Table 3).

After interviewing the seven students it was evident that one of the key factors that influenced all of the students' book selections was the impact of the classroom teacher. All of the seven students followed the teacher's directions by selecting one fiction book and one informational text book. It was evident by statements of all seven students that they had to select an informational book with certain text features instead of selecting a nonfiction book that they would have chosen on their own. As noted in Table 2, many students found books in at least one of their topic interest areas. This was especially true with their fiction selections.

As students selected their books from the library, it was evident that certain topics that students had indicated in their Topic of Interest Questionnaire (see Table 1) were not the same topics that students actually selected (see Table 2). A noticeable factor was that six of the seven students had indicated in their survey that they liked the topic of sports, yet when those students selected their books from the library, only two of those students actually selected sports books. It was apparent that the other four students could not locate a sports book that fit the specifications of a nonfiction informational text that the teacher required.

Table 3

*Influences on How Books Were Selected*

How book was chosen	Students							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Total
Topic	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	7
Series	x	x	x	x				4
Renewed	x	x	x		x	x		5
Teacher Requested	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	7
Peer Recommendation		x						1
Back Summary	x				x		x	3
Skimming through book				x				1
Pictures in book							x	1
Five Finger Rule				x			x	2
Iowa Children's Choice							x	

When students responded to their questionnaires (see Appendix B), five of the seven students interviewed revealed that they were interested in the topic of characters different from themselves (see Table 1). Yet when students selected their library books, only one student chose a book about characters that were different from themselves (see Table 2). Students' actual book selection of topics (see Table 2) was clearly different from preferences reported on their questionnaires. For example (see Table 1), five students selected the topic of character their own age that have done amazing things, yet none of the students actually selected a book on that topic (see Table 2).

The interviews of these students showed further insight into how these students selected their library books. All seven students selected their books based on the topics of the book. Four of the students stated that they selected fiction books from series. Five of the students had to renew their library books because they had yet to finish reading. Also all seven students selected books based upon the classroom teacher's request of one non-fiction and one fiction book. One student selected a book based upon a peer recommendation. Three of the students also indicated that they used the summary in the back of the book to help them select a book. One student said that she skimmed through books in order to find a good fit book. One student selected a book from the Iowa Children's Choice Award list of the Iowa Association of School Librarians. One student stated the use of pictures helped them select their books. And two of the students shared that they used the five finger rule to assist them when they selected their library books (see Table 3).



## **CHAPTER 5**

### **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The purpose of this study was to discover how fifth grade students selected library books when seeking resources for voluntary reading. This research study was designed to answer the following questions: Why do fifth grade students choose the books they do from the library? How do fifth grade students use cover pictures, illustrations and the book summary on the back cover when selecting books? What other criteria do fifth grade students use in book selection? What factors cause fifth grade students to avoid choosing books in the library? The data was collected based on interviews of seven fifth grade students within a school library in an urban elementary school in Iowa.

#### **Conclusions**

In conclusion when students were selecting books for reading, the classroom teacher had the greatest influence on the student's decision. Another deciding factor of the student's choice in selected reading was based up the topic of their personal interest.

The classroom teacher's directions on what type of non-fiction informational book to select greatly limited the student's choices on what type of books they could select from the library (see Table 3). Because of the classroom teacher's directions when selecting a nonfiction informational book, students had to look at specific items in the books to meet the assigned criteria. The students were focused on meeting the criteria provided by the classroom teacher when selecting non-fiction informational books.

Of interest was the fact that the teacher librarian demonstrated no influence over these students' book selection. Instead, the students were primarily responsible for selecting their own library books. The researcher saw that the teacher librarian expected that each student

have a fiction book and a nonfiction book as required by the classroom teacher. The teacher librarian never interacted or guided these particular students to a particular area to select their library books. Students in this study did not refer to the teacher librarian for assistance on locating books in the fiction or nonfiction areas of the library. As students checked out their library books, they were able to use a self-service checkout station where they scanned their own books through Destiny. The teacher librarian would randomly check the self-checkout station to make sure that students were checking out their books properly. The teacher librarian helped other students locate nonfiction informational books that met the criteria the teacher requested. During these students' checkout time the teacher librarian was the only adult in the library available to help students.

It was apparent that by this grade level students knew the expectations of where to select books and how to locate the books on their own. The seven students in this study had various feelings about their book selections. All of the students were happy with their selection of books from the fiction section, but some students felt as though they were limited on the choice of books they could select for their nonfiction book. Some of the students seemed to be more focused on finding nonfiction informational books that contained specific text features than on books that also met their interests.

When students selected fiction books, they used a variety of methods such as peer recommendations, book summaries, the five finger rule, and pictures. It was apparent that students displayed more consideration in selecting fiction books when they were not limited based upon particular criteria for selecting books. Students also indicated that they enjoyed reading fiction books because it was a book based upon their interest.

### **Recommendations**

Students should be provided the opportunity to have access to a variety of books in the library. It is important to allow students the freedom to choose books of their choice when selecting library books. Students should also be encouraged to expand their interest in different topics. Teachers have the power to provide students with exposure to various literature and topics, therefore the teacher and teacher librarian can motivate students to read about topics that may not be familiar to them. Teachers and teacher librarians have to continue to support students in their capabilities of being able to choose their own books, as well as assist in guiding them to unfamiliar topics.

Another recommendation would be that students should not be limited to the type of books they can check out from the library due to classroom teacher's requirements for specific book formats that they are teaching in the classroom. When the classroom teacher needs to teach students about a particular format of text, students should be either given the opportunity to select additional books in their checkout selection or provided with library books checked out in the teacher's name, therefore not restricting the student's individual choices.

Additional studies could include interviews and observations of a larger number of students within the school population. If a larger number of students were researched, more information could be learned about what additional motivators impact how students select books. Also other studies could explore the differences between urban and rural students and their selection of books. Another study could look at the impact of the instruction of teacher librarians guiding students in selecting library books. Lastly another study could investigate what type of books students would like to select if they were given the chance to pick books without the limitation of selecting one fiction and one nonfiction book from the library.

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**APPENDIX A****Topic of Interest Questionnaire**

What do you like read about? Circle all the topics you like

Science

Animals

Sports

Fantasy characters

Musicians

Celebrities

Historical figures

Romance

Science Fiction

Transportation (airplanes, cars, trains)

Characters my age who have done some amazing things

Characters from other countries

Characters who have overcome great obstacles

Characters a lot different from me

Character like me

## **APPENDIX B**

### **Student Interview Questions**

Ask the following questions after students have selected a book during library class time:

1. Tell me how you chose that book.
2. Tell me what you were thinking in your head when you were asked to go select a book.
3. Can you tell me what makes a book exciting to read?
4. Tell me what is your favorite type of book to read?
5. How do you know how to choose books?
6. Tell me what kind of books d you usually look for in the library.